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Lia Raffaella Cresci, Francesca Gazzano (ed.), *De imperiis: l'idea di impero universale e la successione degli imperi nell'antichità. Rapporti interstatali nell'antichità*, 9. Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2018. Pp. 325. ISBN 9788891312457. €144.00.

**Reviewed by Olivier Hekster, Radboud Universiteit
(o.hekster@let.ru.nl)**

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This volume originated as a conference at Genoa in October 2015. It brings together thirteen articles. Eleven are in Italian, one in Spanish and one in English. Almost all the articles discuss *translatio imperii*, in that they look at how the notion of ‘successions of empires’ has influenced ideological frameworks and historiographic debates in antiquity. The notion of ‘universal empire’, prominent in the title, comes to the fore less systematically. It is indicative that there is not a single reference to Bang and Kołodziejczyk’s *Universal Empire* in the volume. [1](#)

A brief but useful introduction sets out some of the underlying notions of the volume. It mentions four aspects on which the volume contributes to academic debate. Firstly, it highlights empires which are often peripheral in debates surrounding the succession of empires (such as Egypt). Secondly, it looks at modes in which notions of *translatio imperii* and universal emperorship have been employed to formulate rule. Thirdly, it shows some new perspectives on paradigmatic empires within theories of succession: Persia, Macedonia and Rome. Finally, articles in the volume pay specific attention to late antique and Byzantine discussions of *translatio imperii*. These aspects do indeed feature in the articles, but often in a somewhat intuitive way. Subdivisions or overarching themes remain rather implicit. The volume is not structured alongside the above-named aspects, but (more or less) in a chronological order of the source-material treated in each chapter. Most of that source material is literary; there are only three images in the book, one of which is of fairly low quality.

Francesco Mari opens the volume with a discussion of ‘Il miraggio di Ecbatana. Il dibattito sull’*impero* dei Medi e l’ipotesi di una provenienza iranica per l’idea di *translatio imperii* in Erodoto’ (pp. 3-36). It summarizes discussions on the existence and nature of a Median

‘empire’, focusing on historiographical material, in particular Herodotus. As follows from the lengthy title to the article, Mari argues that Herodotus’ *mēdikos logos*, which provides the first expression of the idea of *translatio imperii*, derives from Iranian, probably Achaemenid, oral sources.

Francesca Gazzano follows with a fascinating analysis of ‘L’impero che non fu. La Lidia nella successione degli imperi’ (pp. 39-63). Her key question is why Lydia—hardly a proper ‘empire’ by any definition—is often mentioned in Graeco-Roman lists of successive empires. The reason, according to Gazzano, is less Lydia’s perceived imperial status, and more the historical importance Croesus played—not as a ruler who gained universal power but as one whose fall allowed Cyrus to found a universal empire. Gazzano provides an overview of ancient citations of successive empires on pp. 62-63, which could have usefully been an appendix to the whole book, if expanded with authors whom Gazzano does not deal with.

Omar Coloru follows up on the findings from his superb 2009 study on ancient Bactria in the brief ‘Come Alessandro, oltre Alessandro. Comunicare il potere nel regno Greco-battriano e nei regni indo-greci’ (pp. 67-80). ² He highlights the importance of Alexander the Great in the ideological positioning of Greek kings of Bactria and India. The notion of *translatio imperii* is stressed by noting how kings positioned themselves as successors to Alexander. Alexander, however, over time became a mythical figure, comparable to Herakles and Dionysos as abstract conqueror of India. This was not someone whom one could politically succeed, leading to a more vague rapport between kings and Alexander.

In the extensive ‘L’anello debole della catena? L’egemonia macedone nella tradizione antica sulla *translatio imperii*’ by Federicomaria Muccioli (pp. 83-135), the focus is on historiography surrounding Macedonia as paradigmatic empire. The article can be usefully compared to Gazzano’s analysis of Lydia; why and when were certain ‘empires’ attractive to use as potential predecessors? Macedonia, Muccioli makes clear, was a useful empire to call to mind when in opposition to Rome. A number of Greek authors writing in the Roman period minimized Macedonian ‘imperial’ status, but eastern monarchies, such as Cappadocia, Pontus and Commagene, extensively used (invented) links to Macedonia to politically position themselves. That was also reflected in later ancient texts like the Sibylline Oracles.

In the only Spanish contribution, ‘De Rey del Ponto a Rey de Reyes. El imperio de Mithrídates Eupatór en el contexto del Oriente tardohelenístico’ (pp. 139-170), Luis Ballesteros Pastor discusses how Mithridates Eupator placed his reign within wider imperial history. According to Ballesteros Pastor, Mithridates positioned the Pontic empire outside of any *translatio imperii*, claiming that it was conquered by neither Alexander nor his successors. In his struggle with Rome, Eupator claimed a (peripheral) position in the succession of empires, and included the title ‘King of Kings’ on his gold coinage. In that way, he could boost his claim

to be an alternative to Rome.

The volume continues with two contributions on imperial Rome: Giovanelli Cresci Marrone's '*Imperium sine fine dedi. Il principato di Augusto e il problema della dimensione temporale*' (pp. 173-189) and Giusto Traina's brief 'L'impero romano e il proemio di Appiano' (193-203). Both deal with literary evidence; Cresci Marrone asks how Augustan poets positioned the empire in time rather than in space. One would expect that for most poets the eternal city was supposed to be the endpoint of any *translatio imperii*, and that seems in fact to be the case, though some less pro-Augustan authors, like Pompeius Trogus, indicate possible successors to Rome. Whether that means that the notion of *translatio imperii* was important in imperial Rome is somewhat doubtful. It does not, in fact, figure in Traina's piece, though he notes the structural similarities between Appian's *prooemion* and those of Polybius and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in both of whose works *translatio imperii* figured strongly. Instead, Appian focuses on the spatial dimension, explicitly accepting and defining the borders of the Empire. Appian's Rome no longer claimed to be a universal empire.

A Persian perspective is put forward in the too brief English contribution by Touraj Daryaee, 'Alexander the Great and the succession of Persian empires' (pp. 207-215). Daryaee examines the role of Alexander as lynchpin in discussions about successions of empires in the ancient Iranian world, through his portrayal in Pahlavi and classical Persian literature. There are interesting observations here, but the article supplies too little context or background for the non-initiated reader (of whom this reviewer is one) to usefully compare this Iranian Alexander to, for instance, the Bactrian Alexander in Coloru's contribution. This is somewhat of a missed opportunity for the volume, since the east-west divide in perceptions of *translatio imperii* is one of the recurring features in many articles. It would have been nice to see that addressed more extensively by stronger emphasis on what happened outside the Graeco-Roman world, something for which Daryaee supplies an interesting starting point.³

The last five articles of the volume deal with notions of *translatio imperii* in late-antique and byzantine sources. In his very substantial '*translatio studii et imperii. Diodoro, Africano e Giovanni Malala sul ruolo dell'Egitto nella storia universale*' (pp. 219-261), Umberto Roberto looks at the surprising absence of Egypt from traditional discussions on *translatio imperii*. In a detailed overview of various texts, Roberto shows that Egypt plays an important role as place of origin for wisdom, science and technology in ancient historiography, and is also an illustrative example for the decline of empire. Egypt, Roberto shows, is often used in ancient reflections on power and political hegemony, even if it is excluded from traditional schemes of *translatio imperii*. John Malalas, whom Roberto refers to extensively, is the subject of Agnese Fontana's '*Translatio imperii nella Chronographia di Giovanni Malala: libri I-IX*' (pp. 265-289). She convincingly shows how the sequence of empires in Malalas' first nine books is a narrative framework, not an eschatological one. There is a

surprising lack of cross-references between this chapter and that of Roberto, especially in discussions of Malalas' description of Egyptian universal dominion. Nor are there cross-references between either article and Lia Raffaella Cresci's discussion 'Si come per levare (Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Rime* 152): Giorgio Monasco e Giovanni Malala a proposito di successione degli imperi' (pp. 315-332). In it, she shows how the ninth-century George Hamartolos works from the text of John Malalas' *Chronicle*, but adapts his notions of succession of empires to cohere to contemporary ideology. Having all these three articles in close proximity in one volume allows the reader to ask questions about ways in which notions of *translatio imperii* change over time, and shows how these are at least partly dependent on viewpoints of ancient authors and scholars analyzing those authors. There is much potential here for debate between the three articles, and it is a pity that this is not really reflected in the texts.

Paolo Odorico takes a wider though still dominantly literary view of how to study *translatio imperii* in Byzantine sources in his essayistic 'La *translatio imperii* nella letteratura imperiale di età giustiniana. Un caso di dibattito identitario' (pp. 293-312). He argues that ways in which successive empires are presented in Justinianic texts (with Constantinople as the new Rome) are part of a more general debate about what Byzantine identity should be. Again, the east-west divide is prominent here, less in terms of which empire is included or not, but more in relation to what 'origin' one decides to take as relevant historical past.

The final article is a draft version, without notes or bibliography, of the text that was delivered at the conference by Gianfranco Gaggero, before his unexpected death in 2016. The paper, 'Alcune considerazioni sulle quattro monarchie di Danielle e sulle successive riletture cristiane' (pp. 335-347), has the advantage of bringing later Christian traditions into the volume, and again noting specific developments in the eastern Empire through emphasis on (apocalyptic) Syriac sources. Their very eschatological interpretation of *translatio imperii* contrasts sharply with Malalas' vision of events, as interpreted by Fontana earlier in the volume. This again highlights geographical and chronological differentiations.

As is inevitable in conference proceedings, quality and focus on the subject matter vary from article to article. Through the dominant attention on literary sources, there is more coherence than in many volumes, and the semi-chronological structuring of the volume helps bringing out interesting contrasts and continuities. It is a pity that there is no real attempt to bring the various articles together. That would have lifted this volume from a series of useful contributions to analyzing ancient thoughts on *translatio imperii*, to a historiographic analysis of how *translatio imperii* came to be understood in a spatially and temporally divided 'ancient' world. Still, the contributions are valuable in themselves, and I learned much from reading the volume. Equally importantly, it raised interesting questions—even if it did not answer all of them.

On the whole the book is well edited, though there is a surprising number

of references in the various bibliographies at the end of each article to works that were not referred to in the notes. The basis of literature for many of the articles is dominantly Italian and French scholarship, testifying to an increasing and unfortunate division between different linguistic traditions in the field. At the exorbitant prize of Euro 180, the book is unlikely to be widely distributed, and at that price, the press should have really provided indices of some sorts. The brief abstracts of articles at the end of the volume are no compensation for the absence of at least an index of names. For proper use of the volume, an *index locorum* would have been extremely helpful.

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Notes:

1. Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk (eds.), *Universal*

Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History. Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012 (BMCR [2014.08.10](#)). See now also Mark Altaweel and Andrea Squitieri (eds.) *Revolutionizing a World From Small States to Universalism in the Pre-Islamic Near East*. London: UCL Press 2018.

2. Coloru Omar, *Da Alessandro a Menandro: il regno greco di Battriana*, Studi ellenistici 21, Pisa/Roma: Fabrizio Serra editore, 2009 (BMCR [2010.10.33](#)).

3. In this context, it would be worth including the cosmocratic ideals of the Roman and Sassanian empire, which were taken up in the Umayyad caliphate, as discussed by Matthew P. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran. The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 45. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2009, which is not referred to in the volume (BMCR [2011.04.16](#)).

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